

Message Text

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NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM LEWIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR BREZEVINSKI

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, IS, LO

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN: SOUTHERN LEBANON

1. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM A 90-MINUTE MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN, MOST OF WHICH WAS DEVOTED TO THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON. DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN, DIRECTOR GENERAL EVRON, AND DCM VIETS WERE ALSO PRESENT.
2. BEGIN LED INTO THE CONVERSATION BY NOTING THAT HE HAD JUST FINISHED DRAFTING A RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S LETTER. HE SAID THAT IN THE SECTION DEVOTED TO THE LEBANESE SITUATION HE HAD PERSONALLY INSERTED A SENTENCE PROMISING THAT "WE SHALL NOT ACT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON AGAINST YOUR (I.E., THE PRESIDENT'S WISHES) OR WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION." THERE WOULD BE NO SURPRISES, HE SAID, AND THERE WOULD BE NO ISRAELI INITIATIVES WITHOUT PRESIDENT CARTER'S PRIOR APPROVAL.
3. BUT THEN WAXING EMOTIONALLY, BEGIN CHARACTERIZED THE SITUATION AS INCREASINGLY SERIOUS AND DETERIORATING BY THE DAY. MORALE OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA WAS AT ROCK BOTTOM. MAJOR HADDAD, THE
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4. THE PM THEM TURNED TO DEFMIN WEIZMAN AND ASKED HIM TO BRIEF ME ON THE SITUATION. WEIZMAN COMMENCED BY OBSERVING IT WAS

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CHRISTIAN COMMANDER, WAS THREATENING TO RESIGN. THERE WERE "HORRIBLE" ARTILLERY BARRAGES EVERY NIGHT. THE SUM OF THIS WOULD BE MORE MASSACRES AND MORE GENOCIDE. "THIS IS ON OUR CONSCIENCE."

USEFUL TO RECALL THAT IT WAS THE CHRISTIAN VILLAGERS WHO HAD FIRST COME TO THE ISRAELIS AND ASKED FOR ASSISTANCE SOME 18 MONTHS AGO. THIS HAD BEEN MADE AVAILABLE IN THE FORM OF SMALL ARMS (MOSTLY RUSSIAN), SOME AMMUNITION, AND "A LITTLE ARMOR AND SOME ARTILLERY, NONE OF IT AMERICAN." IN ADDITION, ISRAEL HAD SUPPLIED AN INCREASING AMOUNT OF ECONOMIC AID INCLUDING FOOD, CONSUMER GOODS, MEDICAL CARE, ETC. WEIZMAN SAID CURRENT MILITARY OPERATIONS BY ISRAELI MILITARY FORCES WERE EXCLUSIVELY DEVOTED TO ARTILLERY FIRE AND TO NIGHTTIME OPERATIONS, "SOMETIMES BY FOOT AND SOMETIMES MECHANIZED." THE OPERATIONS WERE USUALLY AT THE PLATOON LEVEL, ALTHOUGH THEY VARIED IN SIZE. THE FORCES WITHDREW DURING THE DAY, BUT IT WOULD "GIVE THEM GREAT MORAL ASSISTANCE IF THEY WERE TO HAVE A FEW PEOPLE STAY ON DURING THE DAY." (FYI...LATER IN THE CONVERSATION WEIZMAN CONTRADICTED HIMSELF AND ADMITTED THAT A FEW SOLDIERS IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES DID REMAIN BEHIND DURING THE DAY "FOR MORALE PURPOSES.") BEGIN CHIMED IN, "YES, EVEN GENERAL RAFUL (IDF NORTHERN COMMANDER) WALKED OVER YESTERDAY TO VIEW THE SITUATION*"

5. CONTINUING, WEIZMAN SAID THE MAJOR PROBLEM FOR THE CHRISTIAN FORCES CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF SUPPLY. THERE IS NO LINK BETWEEN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH. HAIFA IS NO LONGER USED AS A PORT BY THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS. RECENTLY THEY HAD ASKED FOR ISRAELI ASSISTANCE IN SECURING A PORT OF ENTRY VIA THE FISHING VILLAGE OF AN NAGURAH, SOME 3 KMS. NORTH OF THE ISRAEL/LEBANON BORDER. WEIZMAN SAID THE
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IDF HAD BEEN ON THE VERGE YESTERDAY OF A NIGHTTIME OPERATION WITH THE AIM OF CAPTURING THE VILLAGE AND TURNING IT OVER TO THE CHRISTIANS. (IT IS NOW IN PLO HANDS), BUT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD ORDERED THE OPERATION STOPPED FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER. WEIZMAN SAID THE IDF STILL VERY MUCH WANTS TO UNDERTAKE THE OPERATION.

6. WHEN I QUESTIONED HIM CLOSELY ON THE NEED FOR SUCH AN OPERATION, HE RESPONDED, "IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE HAVE A BELT OF FRIENDLY POPULATION BETWEEN US AND THE PLO." HE SAID THE PRESENT SITUATION OFFERS UNPARALLEL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISRAEL IN THE POLITICAL, MORAL, AND HUMANITARIAN DOMAINS. ISRAEL'S POLICY IS PREDICATED SOLELY ON FORCING THE PLO FORCES TO MOVE NORTH OF THE LITANI RIVER. THAT WOULD PROVIDE A SUFFICIENT BUFFER ZONE TO ENSURE THAT THE PLO WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO MOUNT ANY EFFECTIVE CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS IN THE FUTURE.

7. I SAID THAT WHILE WE DID NOT CLAIM TO KNOW AS MUCH ABOUT THE MORALE SITUATION AS THE ISRAELIS, WE HAD NO EVIDENCE TO INDICATE SUCH A DRAMATIC DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION WAS TAKING PLACE. I THEN SHARED WITH THEM ESSENCE OF PARAS 4, 5, AND 6 OF DEPARTMENT'S EXCELLENT INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE (STATE

193697). I SAID THAT AS BEGIN HAD REQUESTED, THE SECRETARY HAD URGED ASSAD TO BRING PRESSURE ON THE PALESTINIANS TO WITHDRAW NORTH OF THE LITANI. WE HAD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ASSAD HAD LEANED HARD ON ARAFAT TO DO SO AND TO LIVE UP THE SHTAWRAH AGREEMENT. PRESSING THE ISSUE, I SAID THAT ONE MAJOR CONCERN REMAINED THE UNANSWERED QUESTION I HAD RAISED WITH EVRON LAST WEEK: NAMELY, COULD WE BE ASSURED THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO PREVENT THE CHRISTIANS FROM OCCUPYING VILLAGES VACATED BY THE PLO FOLLOWING A WITHDRAWAL.

8. BEGIN IMMEDIATELY RESPONDED THAT IF IT COULD BE GUARANTEED THAT ANY LEBANESE FORCE INSERTED INTO THE AREA WOULD NOT CONTAIN ANY SYRIAN TROOPS AND WOULD NOT BE UNDER SYRIAN CONTROL, "WE
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WOULD TELL OUR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS NOT TO GO INTO THE VILLAGES EVACUATED BY THE PLO, AND I THINK THEY WOULD HEED OUR ADVICE." WEIZMAN BROKE IN TO OBSERVE THAT THE QUESTION WAS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IN THE INTERIM PERIOD. WHAT IF THE PLO DOESN'T WITHDRAW? THEN ISRAEL WOULD BE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT A POPULATION WITH WHICH IT MAINTAINS CLOSE LINKS. SHOULD IT CONTINUE TO HELP THE CHRISTIANS? OBJECTIVELY SPEAKING, THE ANSWER HAD TO BE YES. AND ONE OF THE KEYS WOULD BE THE AN NAGURAH OPERATION. "WE DON'T WANT TO WALK IN WITH A BRIGADE, OR EVEN A BATTALION. IT WOULD BE ONLY A TWO-COMPANY OPERATION. WE WOULD STAY NO MORE THAN A FEW HOURS IN THE COVER OF DARKNESS. THEN THE CHRISTIANS WOULD TAKE OVER AND RENEW THEIR SUPPLY LINK WITH THE NORTH. THAT IS WHY WE ARE SO ANXIOUS TO OBTAIN YOUR PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL FOR THE OPERATION."

9. THE PM INTERJECTED THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD RECENTLY RECEIVED A REQUEST FROM THE LEBANESE ARMY TO RENEW FORMAL CONTACTS THROUGH THE ILMAC (MIXED ARMISTICE COMMISSION). HE HAD GIVEN HIS APPROVAL TODAY, AND MEETINGS WOULD SOON TAKE PLACE ON THE ISLAND OF RHODES. I SAID THIS SOUNDED LIKE A STEP FORWARD, BUT THAT I WANTED TO MAKE CERTAIN I UNDERSTOOD CLEARLY WHAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD DO IF THE PALESTINIANS WITHDREW TO THE ARQUOB REGION AND THERE WERE AN EFFECTIVE CEASEFIRE. COULD BEGIN ASSURE US THAT HE WOULD DO EVERYTHING HE COULD TO GUARANTEE THAT THE CHRISTIANS WOULD NOT OCCUPY THE VACATED VILLAGES. NODDING EMPHATICALLY, BEGIN REPLIED, "YOU CAN ASSURE YOUR PRESIDENT OF PRECISELY THAT."

COMMENT: THE BEGIN/WEIZMAN STRATEGY IS ALL TOO OBVIOUS AND I THINK WE MUST BE VERY WARY OF FALLING FOR THE BAIT. THE LAST THING WE SHOULD DO IS TO PUT THE PRESIDENT IN THE POSITION OF EITHER ENCOURAGING OR VETOING SPECIFIC IDF MILITARY OPERATIONS ON THE SOUTHERN LEBANESE BORDER. TO AVOID SUCH
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ENTRAPMENT, I RECOMMEND THAT I BE AUTHORIZED TO GO BACK TO
BEGIN WITH THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE: THE PRESIDENT GREATLY APPRECIATES
BEGPN'S MODERATION AND RESTRAINT IN THIS SITUATION. IT IS PRECISELY
SUCH EVIDENCE OF STATESMANSHIP THAT OFFERS US OPTIMISM TO BELIEVE
THE POSSIBILITIES OF A CEASE FIRE AND WITHDRAWAL OF THE PLO
FORCES MAY BE WITHIN OUR GRASP. THE PRIME MINISTER'S ASSURANCE
THAT HE WILL DO ALL IN HIS POWER TO PERSUADE THE CHRISTIAN
POPULATION NOT TO OCCUPY VILLAGES FROM WHICH THE PLO HAS
WITHDRAWN REPRESENTS A MAJOR ADVANCE TOWARD OUR MUTUAL GOAL
OF STABILIZING THE SITUATION. WE WILL
IMMEDIATELY CONVEY THIS ASSURANCE TO ASSAD AND URGE HIM TO
REDOUBLE HIS EFFORTS. WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE
IT COULD PROVE CRITICAL TO HIS ATTEMPT TO
PERSUADE THE PLO TO WITHDRAW TO POSITIONS IN THE ARQOUB, THOUGH
WE CANNOT BE CERTAIN HE WILL SUCCEED.
MEANWHILE, WE ALSO WILL BE DOING ALL WE CAN (1) TO HASTEN THE
DEPLOYMENT OF LEBANESE ARMY UNITS TO SOUTHERN LEBANON, AND
(2) TO ENSURE THAT THE UNITS ARE ENTIRELY LEBANESE AND ARE
UNDER KHOURY'S TIGHT PERSONAL SUPERVISION.

FINALLY, IN NO CASE DO I RECOMMEND THAT I BE INSTRUCTED
TO OFFER ANY VIEWS ONE WAY OR THE OTHER ON THE PROPOSED NAGURAH
OPERATION. THE ISRAELIS WILL HAVE NO DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING
THAT NO COMMENT MEANS NO APPROVAL.

10. RECOMMEND THIS MESSAGE BE REPEATED TO BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS.
LEWIS

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
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Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 16-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN: SOUTHERN LEBANON
TAGS: PINR, PBOR, IS, LE, PLO, (BEGIN, MENACHEM)
To: STATE SS MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/44c0f759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
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